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(54) Releasable electrical coupling

(57) A connection device **(70)** provides electrical connection between a stator motor **(50)** of an x-ray tube and a stator cord **(56)**. The connection device is connected with the x-ray tube housing **(30)** by threading a threaded portion into a corresponding threaded aperture in the housing to create a leak-tight seal. The threaded portion is rigidly connected with a connecting portion, such as a bayonet socket, which receives a corresponding fitting **(102)** of the stator cord. An electrical conduction path, hermetically sealed in the connecting device, provides electrical connection between the socket and the interior of the housing. The connection device allows the stator cord to be quickly connected or disconnected from the housing yet provides a seal which resists leakage of cooling oil from the housing.

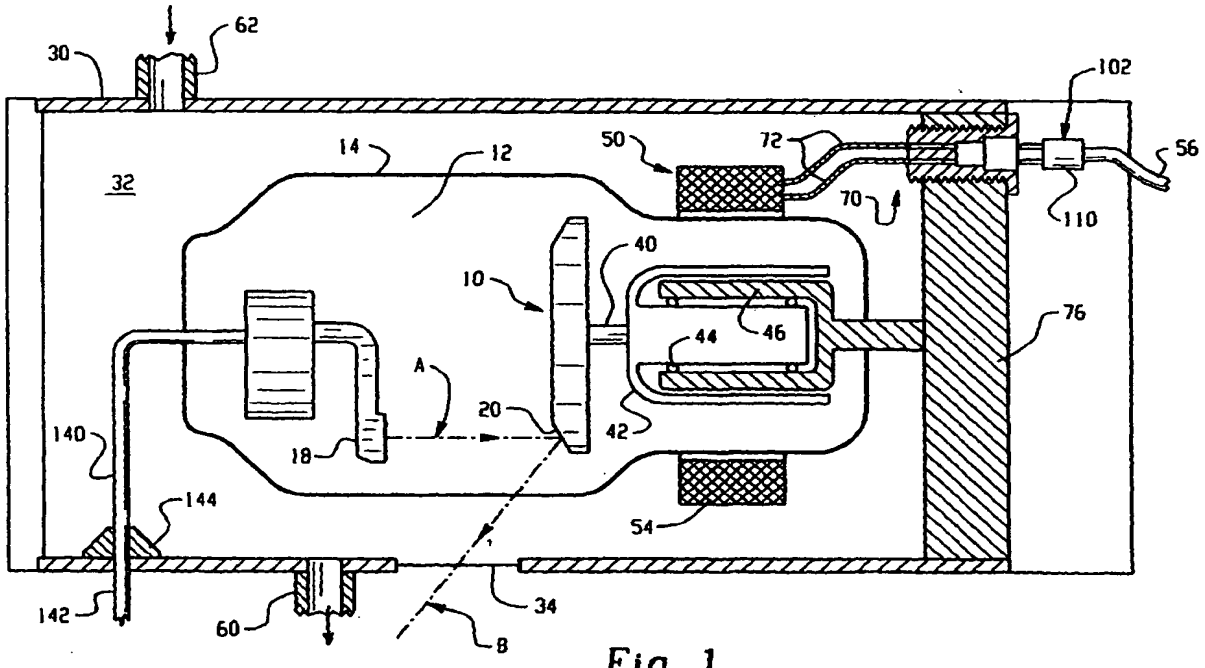

Fig. 1

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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to releasable electrical couplings, especially in the field of vacuum tubes. It finds particular application in connection with a device for linking a stator cord to the housing of an x-ray tube in CT scanners, and will be described with particular reference thereto. It should be appreciated, however, that the invention is also applicable to the formation of sealed couplings for other liquid-containing devices and x-ray tubes for other applications.

[0002] X-ray sources, such as those utilized in the field of medicine for the imaging of subjects, typically include a rotating anode contained within an evacuated envelope. The anode is connected with a rotor having a rotatable shaft. A stator circumferentially surrounds the rotatable shaft. During operation of the x-ray tube, a beam of electrons emitted by a cathode is accelerated towards the anode by a high voltage differential. The electrons strike a target area of the anode where they are converted to x-rays.

[0003] Only a small fraction of the energy of the electron beam is converted to x-rays, however. The majority of the energy is converted to heat, which heats the anode white hot. The x-ray tube envelope is commonly mounted within a housing filled with a cooling oil for carrying away some of the heat. Wires for the stator, filament heater, the voltage differential, and other electrical functions of the x-ray tube pass through the oil-filled housing and out through a port or ports in the housing wall. The wires from the stator (stator cord) typically continue for some distance to the controller for the x-ray tube, in some instances, as much as forty feet away.

[0004] To prevent leakage of the oil from the housing around the stator cord, the port in the housing is preferably sealed oil tight. In some applications, the wires are potted in epoxy or clamped by a plastic fitting. One such fitting has a flange with an O-ring on its underside and is held to the housing with screws. Another such fitting is formed from metal and has a peripheral flange and O-ring on the inside of the housing and a nut threadably received on the outside of the housing to hold the fitting in the wiring port with the O-ring firmly held against the adjacent housing.

[0005] Such fittings tend to be subject to some leakage. The oil in the housing is at relatively low pressure, and thus does not help to seal the O-ring against the housing. Additionally, the hard wiring created provides a wiring harness up to forty feet long, which is awkward and inconvenient. Further, if the x-ray tube is to be replaced, significant hand labor is employed to rewire the tube and reseal the ports through the housing.

[0006] In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, an x-ray apparatus is provided. The x-ray apparatus includes an evacuated envelope and a stator, both within a housing. The stator generates a magnetic field for driving an anode within the envelope. A stator cord, exterior to the housing, electrically connects the stator with a source of power. A connection device, mounted to the housing, forms a releasable electrical coupling between the stator cord and the stator.

[0007] In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a method of electrically connecting a stator cord, located exterior to a housing, with a stator, located within the housing, is provided. The method includes threading a threaded portion of a connecting device into a threaded aperture formed in the housing to provide a seal which resists leakage of liquid from the housing. The method further includes releasably connecting an electrical connector on the stator cord with a socket of the connecting device. The connecting device includes an electrical connection path which provides electrical connection between the socket and the interior of the housing.

[0008] One advantage of the present invention is that it enables leakage through the stator wiring port to be reduced.

[0009] Another advantage of the present invention is that it enables the stator cord to be hermetically sealed.

[0010] Another advantage of the present invention is that it enables a wiring harness to be readily connected and disconnected to an x-ray tube.

[0011] Ways of carrying out the invention will now be described in detail, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGURE 1 is a schematic sectional view of a rotating anode tube in an oil filled housing according to the present invention;

FIGURE 2 is a schematic cross sectional view of a rotating anode tube of FIGURE 1;

FIGURE 3 is a side view in partial section of the rotating anode tube of FIGURE 1;

FIGURE 4 is a greatly enlarged perspective view of the connecting device of FIGURES 1 and 3;

FIGURE 5 is a side view of the connecting device of FIGURE 4;

FIGURE 6 is a top view of the connecting device of FIGURE 4;

FIGURE 7 is a side sectional view of the connecting device of FIGURE 4, mounted into the wall of the x-ray tube housing; and

FIGURE 8 is a side sectional view of an alternative embodiment of the connecting device of FIGURE 1.

[0012] With reference to FIGURE 1, a rotating anode x-ray tube of the type used in medical diagnostic systems for providing a beam of x-ray radiation is shown. The tube includes a rotating anode **10** which is disposed

in an evacuated chamber **12**, defined typically by a glass envelope **14**. A cathode assembly **18** supplies and focuses an electron beam A which strikes a target area **20** of the anode. A portion of the beam strikes the target area of the anode and is converted to x-rays **B**, which are emitted from the x-ray tube. The envelope is enclosed within a housing or cooling oil enclosure **30** filled with an oil **32**. The x-rays pass through the cooling oil and an aluminum window **34** in the cooling oil enclosure or housing. It is this beam **B** of x-rays which serves the medical and diagnostic functions of the x-ray tube.

[0013] The anode is connected by a shaft **40** to a rotor or armature **42**, such as a thin copper cylinder. The shaft is supported by bearings **44** for rotational movement within a stationary cylindrical **46** or sleeve portion of the rotor.

[0014] With reference also to FIGURES 2 and 3, an annular stator **50** is contained within the housing **30** and surrounds the envelope **14** adjacent the rotor. When the stator is energized, driving coils **54** induce magnetic fields in the rotor **42**, which cause the rotor and shaft to rotate relative to the stationary stator **50**. Other types of motors are also contemplated. A stator cord **56** provides electrical connection between the stator **50** and a source of power (not shown).

[0015] The housing **30** is constructed to be oil tight for containing the insulating oil **32**. A significant amount of heat is produced in the dielectric oil during generation of x-rays. The oil is circulated from the housing through an outlet port **60** to a heat exchanger (not shown) where the oil is cooled. The cooled oil is returned to the housing through an inlet port **62**.

[0016] With reference also to FIGURES 4-7, a connection device **70** connects the stator cord **56** with wires **72** within the housing, which run through the oil chamber from the connection device to the stator **50**. FIGURE 3 shows two such connection devices **70, 70'** connected with two sets of wiring, although it is to be appreciated that fewer or more connection devices may be employed.

[0017] The connection device **70** is generally cylindrical and has an exterior portion **74**, which protrudes from the housing and an interior portion **75**, which extends from the external portion into the housing. Specifically, the device is threadably mounted to a wall **76** of the housing, best shown in FIGURE 7. The interior portion **75** of the connection device has a generally cylindrical threaded portion **80**, such as an NPT thread, which is threaded into a tapped aperture **82** in the housing wall having corresponding internal threads **84**. The exterior portion **74** includes a hexagonal flange portion **86** at its interior end, which is seated on an exterior surface **88** of the housing wall **76**. The flange portion is preferably configured for receiving a suitable tool for rotation of the device during tightening or removing the connection device. FIGURES 4 and 6 show the flange portion as having the shape of a hexagonal nut.

[0018] Preferably, an epoxy or other adhesive material **90** is applied to the threaded portion **80** of the connector or the aperture prior to its threaded receipt into the aperture **82**. The adhesive material is allowed to set, to seal the connection device to the housing wall **76** and improve the sealing connection of the device. Oil compatible epoxies are preferred adhesives. The epoxy may be heated prior to application to the threads. Additionally, the threaded portions may also be heated after threading to draw the adhesive into the joint.

[0019] Alternatively, or additionally, a gasket **92** such as an O-ring, received around the threaded portion, is positioned between the flange **86** and the housing wall.

[0020] The external portion **74** of the connection device **70** is configured for receiving a connecting member **102**, such as a bayonet plug, positioned at the housing end of the stator cord **56**. As best shown in FIGURE 4, the external portion includes a bayonet type socket **100** comprising an annular wall **103** which defines a cavity **104**. An interior surface **106** of the wall has slots or indents **108** to assure receipt of a body portion **110** of the connecting member in a preselected orientation. Bores **112** (four are shown in FIGURE 6) extend from the base of the cavity into the threaded portion **80** of the connecting device. Each bore **112** holds a metal connector **114** surrounded by an insulating sleeve **116**. The connector **114** has an interior sleeve **118** into which the wire **72** is soldered, crimped, mechanically fit, or the like. The connector also has a plug receiving sleeve **120** that has one or more portions **122** resiliently extending into the bore to engage the pins of the connector **102** in secure electrical contact. An electrical conduction path **125** is established by the connector **114** between the two sleeves, which also blocks the flow of cooling oil from the housing.

[0021] While the connection device has been shown with a bayonet fitting, other configurations for releasably coupling the connecting member **102** on the stator cord to the connecting device are also contemplated, such as internal threads.

[0022] The threaded portion **80**, the flange portion **86**, and the socket **100** of the connecting member may be integrally formed from a resilient material, such as stainless steel or high temperature plastic, for example, by machining, molding, or the like. Or, they may be separately formed and sealed together. For example, the threaded portion and the flange may be formed from stainless steel and the interior of the portion **80** from plastic or other dielectric material.

[0023] The internal wires **72** are electrically connected with the bores via the interior sleeve **118** in the threaded portion of the connecting device.

[0024] With reference now to FIGURE 8, in one embodiment, the wires **72** are fitted with quick connects **130**, which allow them to be releasably connected to corresponding quick connects in the internal cavity **118**. The quick connects may take the form of spring loaded teeth, as shown in FIGURE 8, which grip pins **132**. The pins form the electrical pathway through the bores **112**.

The quick connects **130** are mounted in a socket **134** which seals a lower open end **136** of the cavity. As shown in FIGURE 8, the socket has an internal threaded connection ring **138** which threads onto the external threads of the threaded portion **80** of the connection device to create a liquid tight or liquid resistant seal for the cavity **118**. This inhibits cooling oil from entering the cavity **118**, and provides an additional barrier to leakage of oil via the connection device.

[0025] To assemble the wiring for the x-ray tube, the exterior of the threaded portion **80** of the connection device is coated with adhesive and threaded into the housing aperture. At this point, the housing may be leak tested to ensure that a leak-tight connection has been made between the connection member and the housing wall. The internal stator wiring **72** is connected to the connection device **70** prior to filling the housing with oil. The x-ray tube can be packed, shipped, and transported around a facility without the cumbersome stator cord **56** attached.

[0026] When the x-ray tube is to be placed into service, the stator cord connector **102** is plugged into the bayonet fitting. The stator cord can be readily removed, when necessary, for replacement of the wiring or for transporting the x-ray tube to a repair site.

[0027] While the invention has been described with reference to a device **70** for connecting a stator cord to an x-ray tube, it should be appreciated that the device may be used for connecting other electrical wiring in the x-ray tube. For example, wiring **140** for the cathode assembly **18** may be connected to external wiring **142** by a similar connection device **144**, as may the high voltage connections.

Claims

1. X-ray apparatus comprising: a housing (30); an evacuated envelope (14) contained within the housing; a stator (50) within the housing, for generating a magnetic field for rotating an anode within the envelope; a stator cord (56) exterior to the housing, for electrically connecting the stator with a source of power; and a connection device (70), mounted to the housing, for forming a releasable electrical coupling between the stator cord (95) and the stator.

2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the connection device (70) is threadably connected with the housing (30).

3. Apparatus as claimed in claim 2, wherein the connection device (70) includes: a threaded portion (80) which is threadably connected with an aperture (82) in a wall (76) of the housing (30); a connection portion (74, 100) for releasably coupling with a corresponding connection member (102) on the stator cord (95); and an electrical conduction path (125) which carries current from the stator cord connection member to wiring (72) of the stator within the housing (30).

4. Apparatus as claimed in claim 3, wherein the electrical conduction path is sealed within the connection member to provide electrical connection between the interior and exterior of the housing (30) and resist leakage of liquid from the housing.

5. Apparatus as claimed in claim 3 or claim 4, wherein the stator wiring is releasably coupled to the electrical conduction path

6. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 5, further including an adhesive, which seals the threaded portion (80) to the aperture in the housing (30).

7. A method of electrically connecting a stator cord (95), located exterior to a housing (30), with a stator (50), located within the housing, the method comprising: threading a threaded portion (80) of a connection device (70), into a threaded aperture (82) formed in the housing to provide a seal which resists leakage of liquid from the housing; releasably connecting an electrical connector (102) on the stator cord (95) with a socket (100) of the connection device, the connection device including an electrical connection path (125) which provides electrical connection between the socket and the interior of the housing.

8. A method as claimed in claim 7, further including the step of forming an electrical connection between the stator (50) and the electrical path (125), by connecting at least one wire (72) within the housing (30) with the electrical path

9. A method as claimed in claim 8, further including the step of connecting the wire (72) within the housing (30) with the electrical path (125) by releasably coupling the wire with the electrical path

10. A method as claimed in any one of claims 7 to 9, wherein, prior to the threading step, an elevated temperature adhesive/sealant is applied to the threaded portion (80).

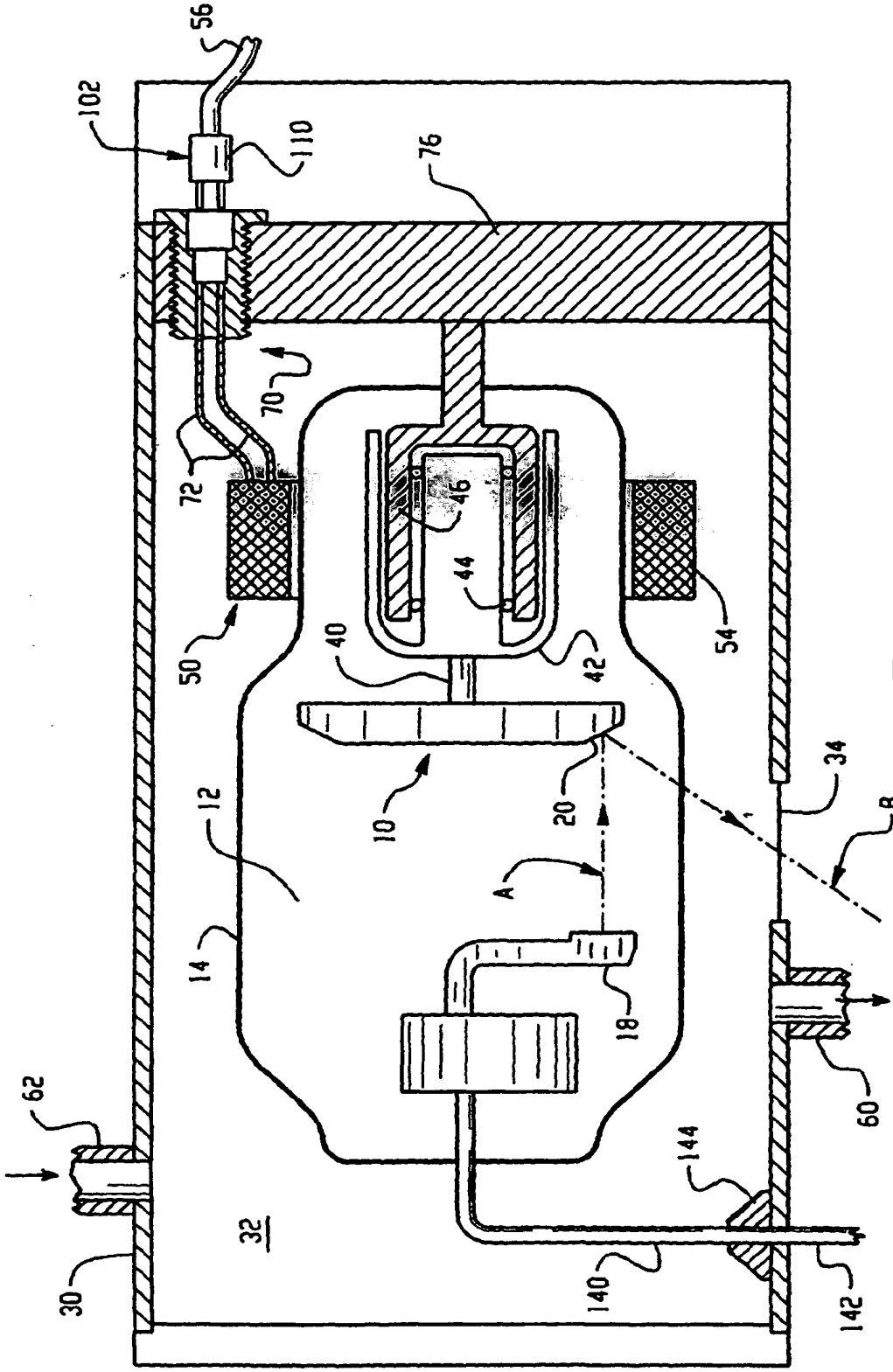

Fig. 1

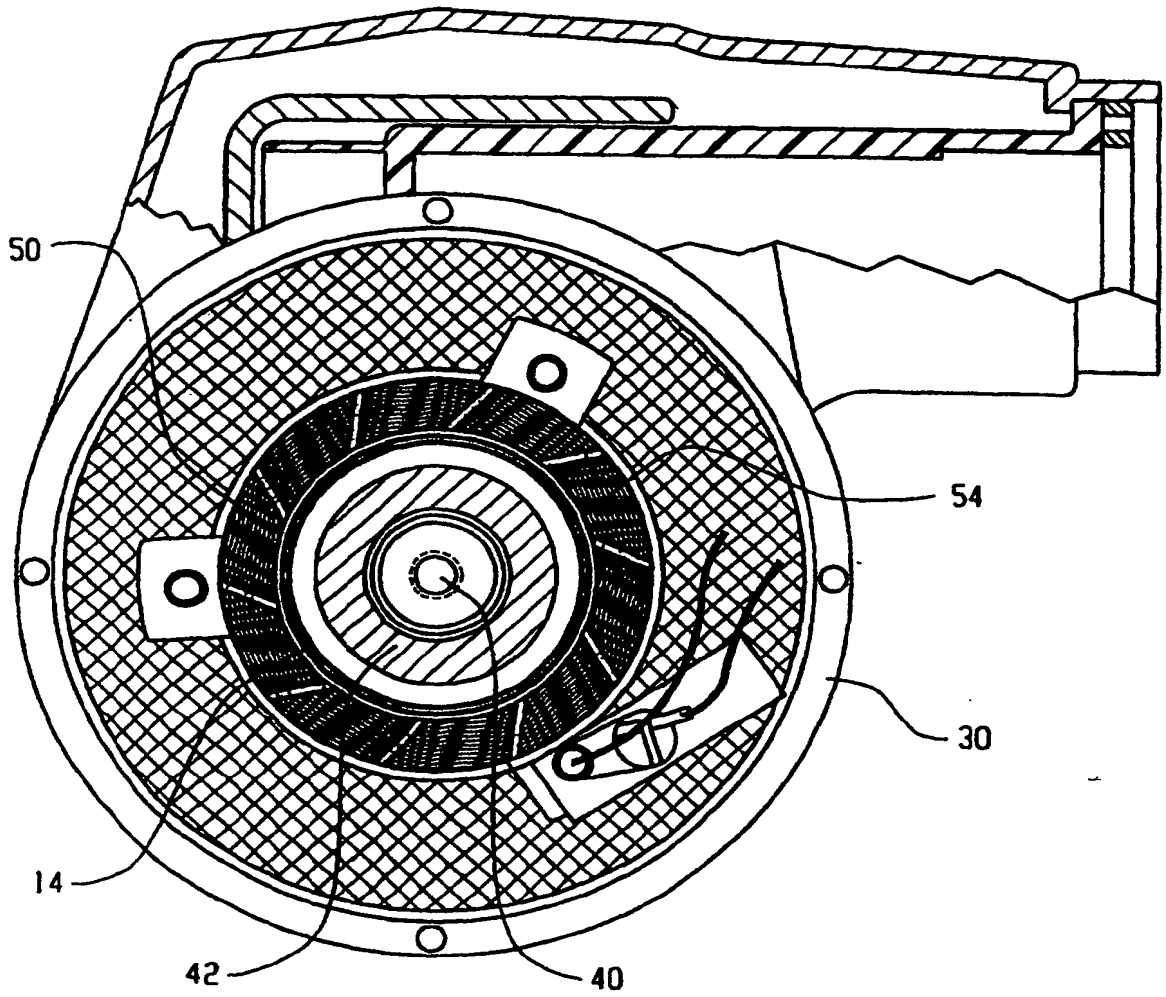

Fig. 2

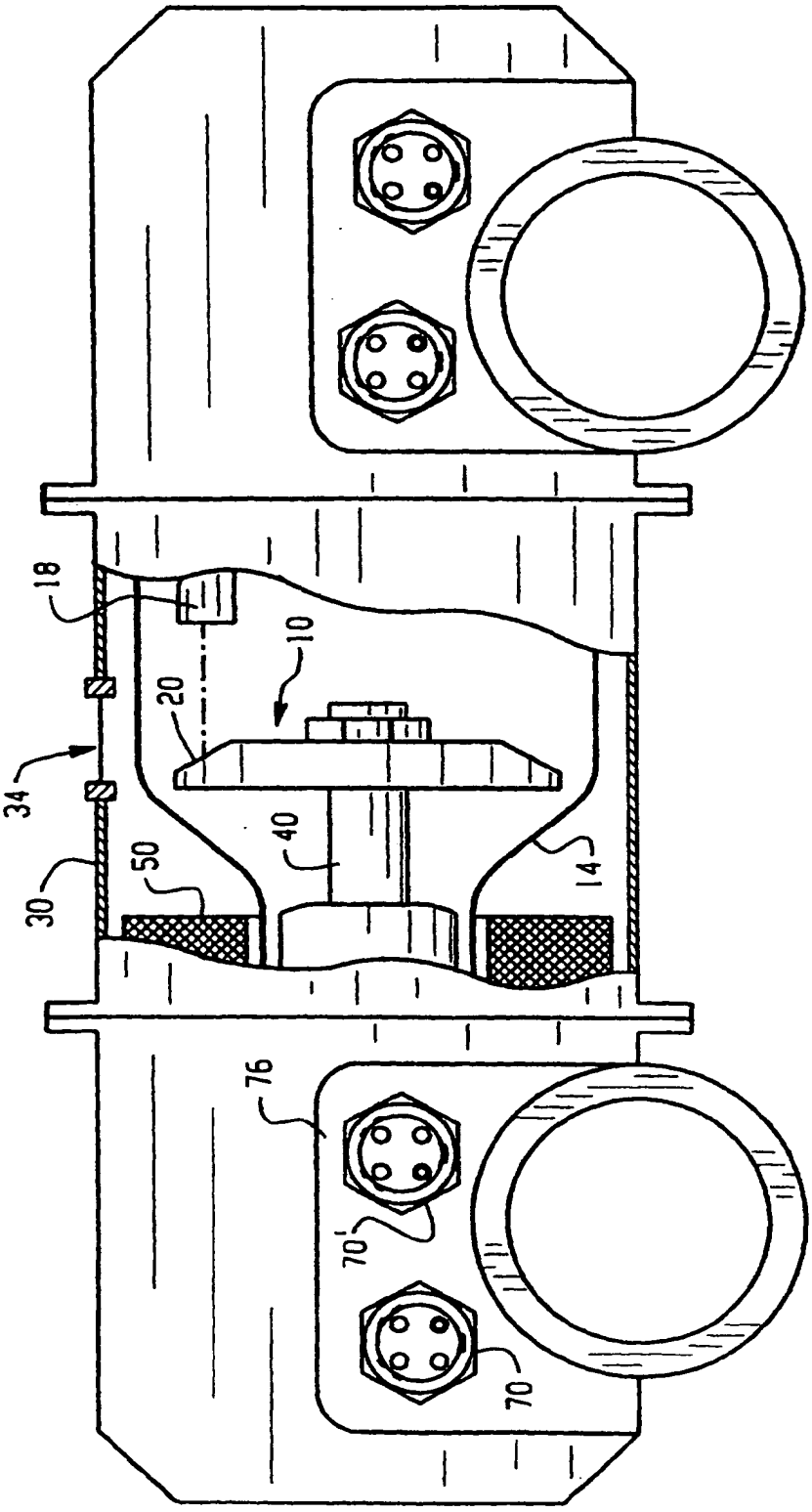

Fig. 3

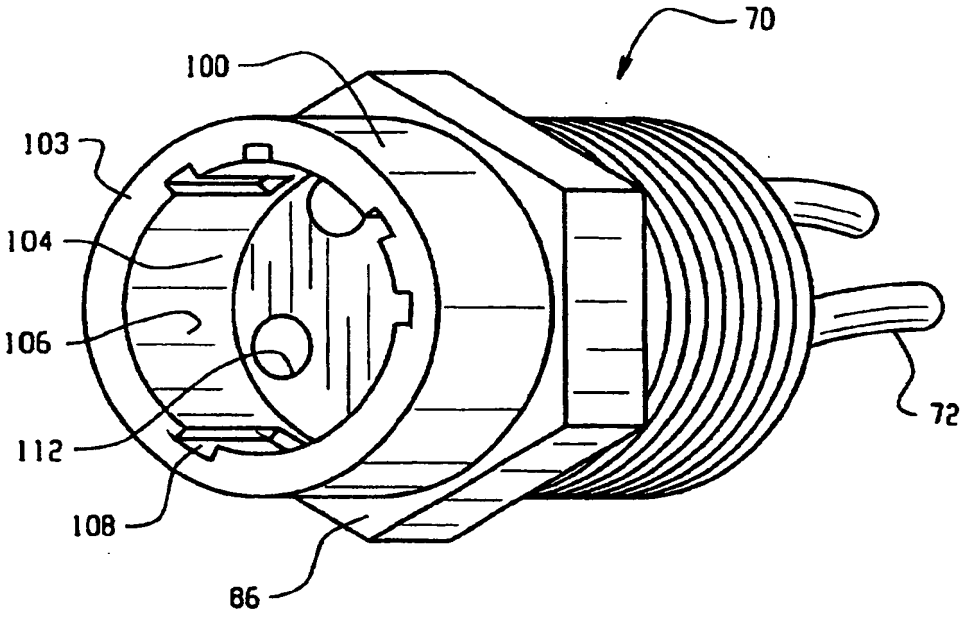

Fig. 4

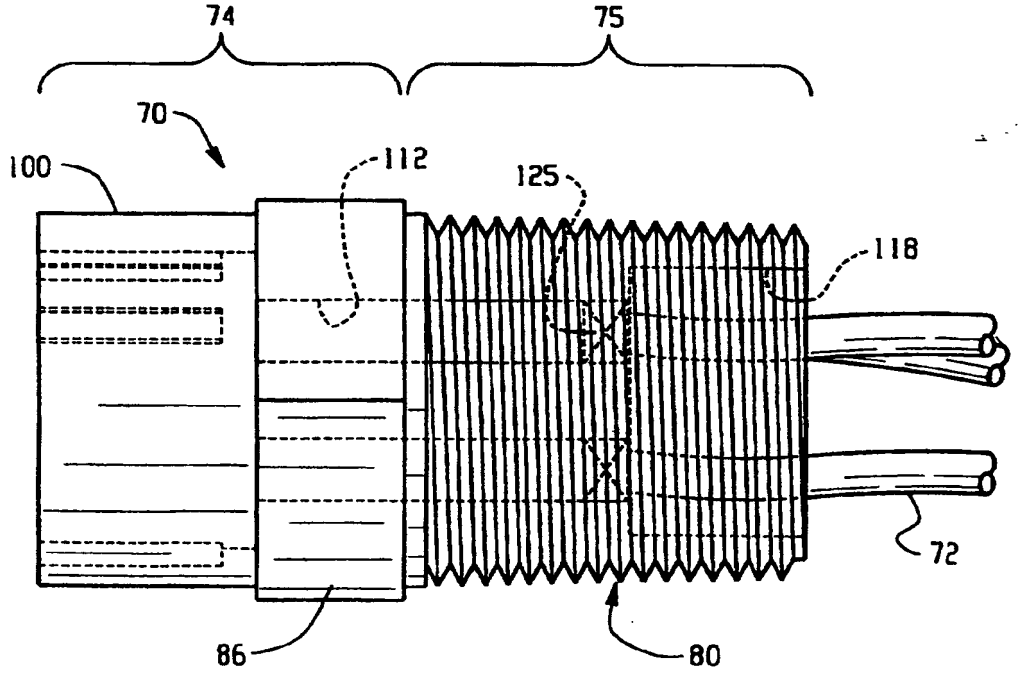

Fig. 5

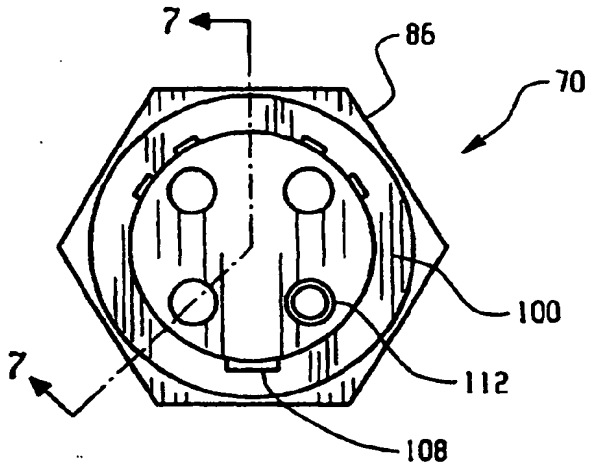

Fig. 6

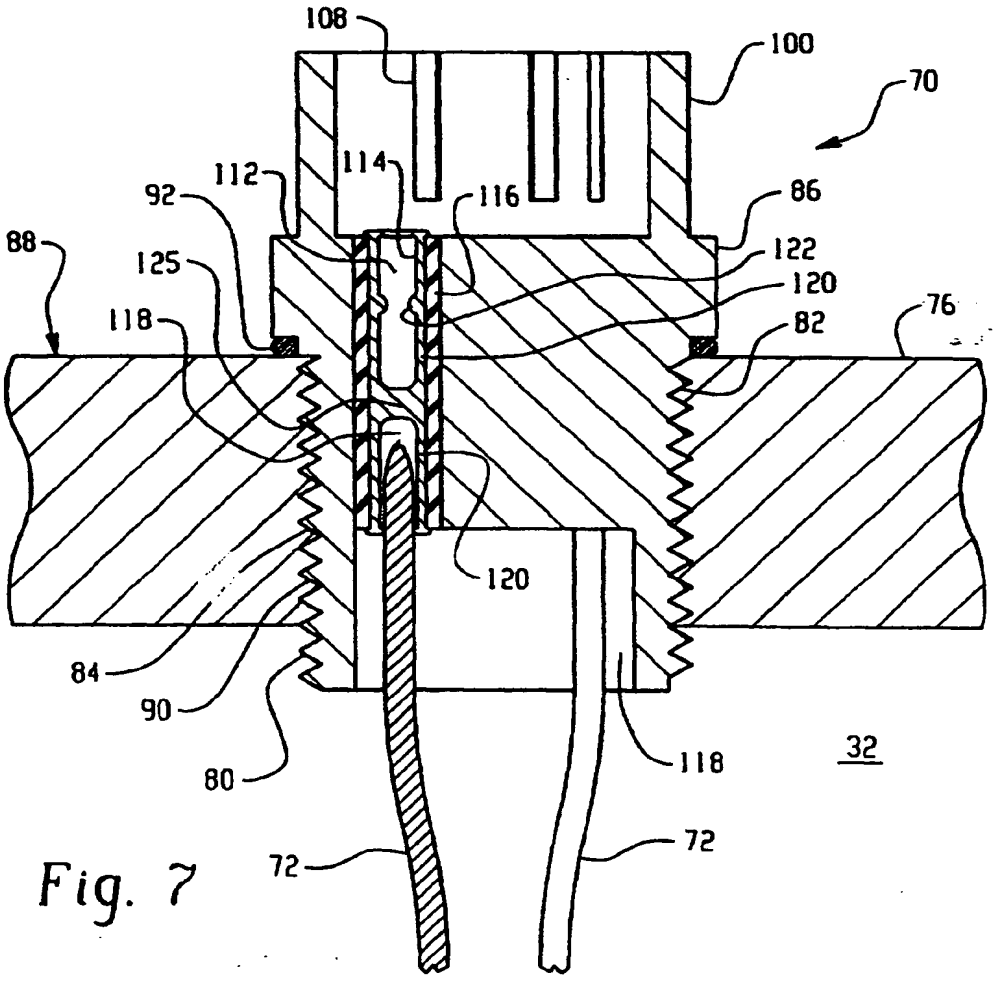

Fig. 7

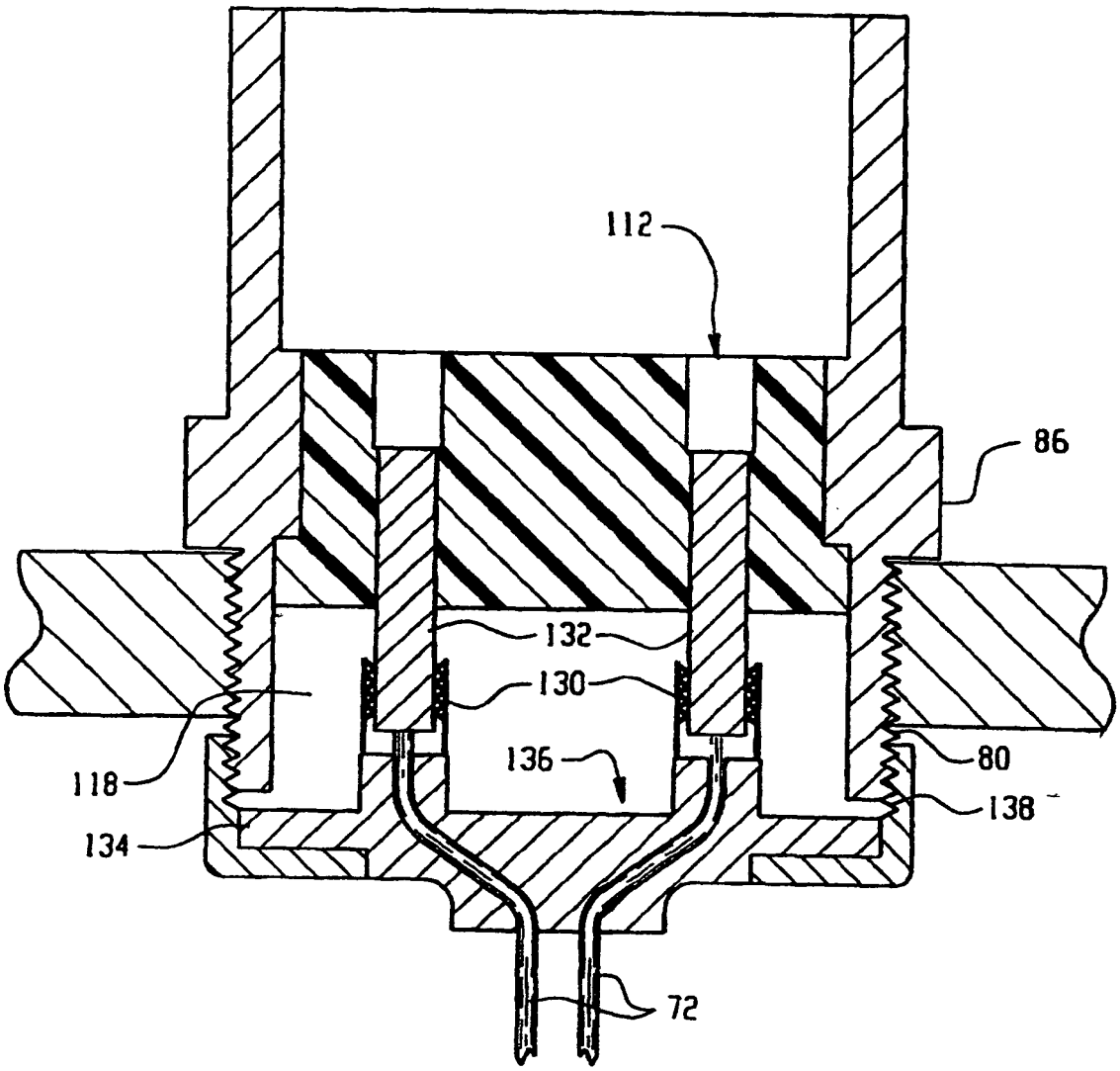

Fig. 8

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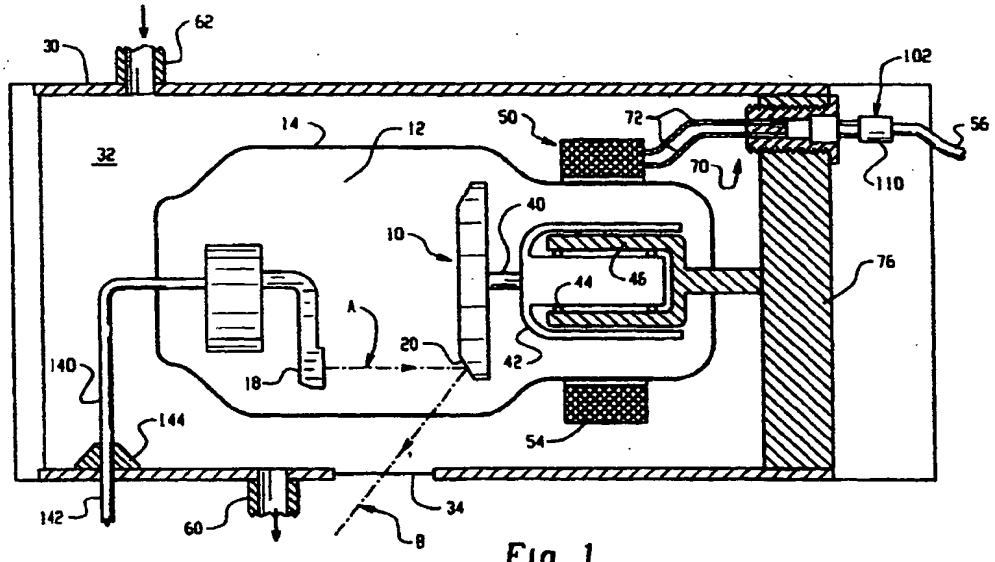

Fig. 1

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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 01 30 6396

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
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CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
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